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HOENKERS' CHAT

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NOTES FOR HERB GARDENERS." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

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One old-time art that has come back into style in recent years is herb gardening. Our grandmothers raised herbs for medicine and seasoning, because they had to produce these things themselves or go without. But as drugstores and groceries came on the scene, garden herbs were neglected or forgotten.

Now many people have come to realize that these old-fashioned herbs are the very "makings" of many a good dish. And certain delicious flavors are only to be had from garden-grown herbs. Many stores don't sell them. You must raise them yourselves or miss these particular taste-treats. So a good many housewives once again have a little 10-by-12 foot plot conveniently near the kitchen door dedicated to herbs. There they grow mint, parsley, chives, sweet marjoram, basil, thyme, tarragon, sage, dill and other favorites of our grandmothers. They may even grow a few nasturtiums in their herb plot for seasoning summer salads, or a couple of rose geranium or lemon verbena plants for flavoring jellies, summer beverages, or other sweet dishes.

Most savory herbs belong to the parsley family and aromatic herbs to the mint family with the exception of chives which belong to the onion family. The flavoring quality in herbs comes from the essential oils in their seeds or leaves. Some herbs hold these oils after they are dried. These are the ones grandmother used to dry for winter use. But others are only at their best when freshly picked. Among the herbs that should be used fresh are mint, parsley, chives, basil,



pasturtium and rose geranium.

Fortunately, herbs are easy to grow. Most of them need only a good rich well-drained garden soil to thrive. If you are starting an herb garden for the first time this year, plow or spade the ground 10 to 12 inches deep and work bone meal, well rotted manure or cottonseed meal into the ground. A plot 10 by 12 feet will need about 3 pounds each of bone meal and cottonseed meal. Be sure the soil is well-mixed and all lumps broken up before you sow your herb seeds or set out roots. Many herbs are biennials or perennials so will come up year after year. All they need is well-cultivated soil, free of weeds, and plenty of water in dry seasons.

There are a few herbs that develop a stronger flavor on poor dry ground than on rich moist ground. Among these are lavender, pot marigold, rue, savory, tarragon and balm. Dill and marigold prefer a rather sandy soil while fennel and rosemary thrive on a limestone soil. But on the whole if you have good well-drained garden loam in your herb garden, they may be expected to prosper fairly well.

Now here are some points on special herbs that you may want to grow. Basil is a favorite for seasoning soup, meat, salad, and any tomato dish. Both leaves and flowers of basil have a clove-like spicy flavor. Basil is good either fresh or dried. The time to pick the tender leaves is when the flowers are in bloom. Basil is an annual. There are two kinds, sweet basil and dwarf basil, which have yellow green leaves and small whitish flowers. A less common variety has purple flowers. Sow basil seeds about three-fourths of an inch deep. Then thin out the seedlings as the bushy plants begin to grow. Basil grows about a foot high.

If you like a delicate onion flavor in your spring salads, omelets, meat dishes, soups and sauces, you'll want some chives in your garden. Chives are much like miniature onions. They are small perennials have dark green, grass-like



foliage and purple flowers. Their tiny bulbs grow in bunches. You can plant chives from seeds, or simply divide the clumps of bulbs either in the fall or early spring, and reset them in rich soil. Use the chopped leaves in salad or cooking.

Marjoram is perhaps the most popular garden herb, used for seasoning soup, meat pie and especially dressings for meat and poultry. The old-fashioned Thanksgiving turkey always had dressing seasoned with marjoram as well as sage. Marjoram is naturally a perennial but in northern climates it dies during the winter so is generally raised from seed as an annual. The seeds are very small and difficult to start, so marjoram is often grown from cuttings or from seeds raised indoors in early spring in specially prepared soil. The leaves and stems of marjoram have a pleasant, very aromatic flavor. Old-fashioned housewives kept fresh marjoram on hand the year around. They grew it in pots indoors during the winter.

The three herbs used for flavoring jellies, beverages and desserts are mint, lemon verbena and rose geranium. Mint is popular for making jelly, in mint sauce for lamb, and with iced tea and other cooling drinks. Lemon verbena is another plant that our grandmothers used in much the same way. Lemon verbena gives a lime or lemon flavor to tea or cold fruit drinks or jelly and does not become bitter on standing. Rose geranium gives a rose flavor.

One point worth noting about using herbs in cooking is not to cook them so long or so hard that all their essential oils or flavoring materials are driven off. The herbs that you use in soups, sauces, and meat and egg dishes -- herbs like thyme, basil, summer savory, marjoram and parsley -- are at their best if heated but not browned in butter a few minutes and added to the dish shortly before serving.

That's all the news about herbs today. More another day.

